

A Brief History Of Youth Work

Adults other than parents have always worked with youth – Jesus for example. (It is commonly held that the apostles were mostly teens when he started working with them.) However, working with youth is not the same as doing youth work. Teachers, coaches, pediatricians and catechists work with youth but aren't youth workers.



Unfortunately, the term *youth work* is inconsistently and poorly defined. A good definition would include:

- Usually not a governmental organization (although there are government based youth works)
- Voluntary participation on the part of the youth
- Having the goal of spiritual or moral improvement, whether through evangelization, character building or rescue work

- Primarily experiential rather than academic.

Many consider the development of Sunday schools in Britain in the late 1700s as an important **forerunner** to youth work because they employed some of youth work's informal methods. However most would claim the beginning was the set up of organizations to meet the needs of young men who had moved into larger cities due to the industrial revolution. The migration resulted in an new social network¹ of young men only.

An early association set up to meet these needs was the *Lediger Verein*, (Singles Club) founded in Basel Switzerland in 1787. A similar, but more commonly known group, was the Young Men's Christian Association, (YMCA) founded in London in 1844.

The YMCA was started by George Williams, a 23-year-old draper concerned about the lack of healthy activities for young men in major cities. So he set up a club to draw young men away from taverns and brothels. He got them to come to Bible studies and prayer meetings. His stated goal was "the improving



of the spiritual condition of young men engaged in the drapery, embroidery, and other trades."



Over time, in the USA, "the Y" as it is now known, has dropped it's Christian identity.

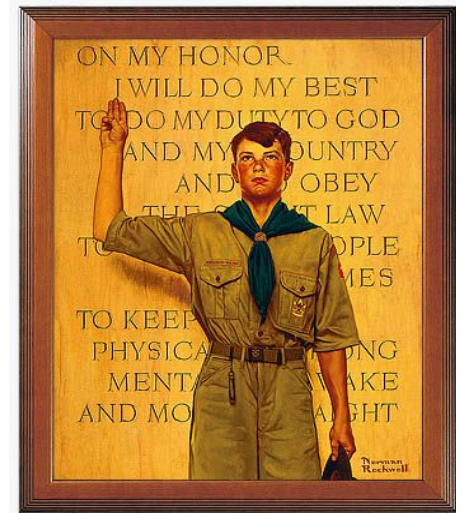
In 1883 the Boys' Brigade was begun in Scotland by William A. Smith. He said he built the program around three of his interests: Sunday school, camping and shooting.

Its more successful offshoot, the Boys Scouts, was founded in 1907 by Boys' Brigade vice-president Robert

Baden-Powell. Like the Boys' Brigade, the Boy Scouts was a uniformed organization.

The Girl Guides/Girl Scouts were founded by Baden-Powell with the aid of his sister Agnes in 1910 because young women were approaching scout leaders asking to join. Baden-Powell thought having girls and boys in the same scout troops would be a distraction for both groups.

Today the Scouts are mainly run by churches. (To be continued...)



Did you know that basketball was invented at a YMCA in Springfield, Massachusetts, in 1891?

¹It would be premature to call the social network "youth culture" since there was no cultural life separate from adults yet.

Why Am I Not Surprised?

A recently released study by the Fuller Youth Institute found some of its results "surprising and counter-intuitive."

They interviewed 500 college-aged youth group graduates and found...

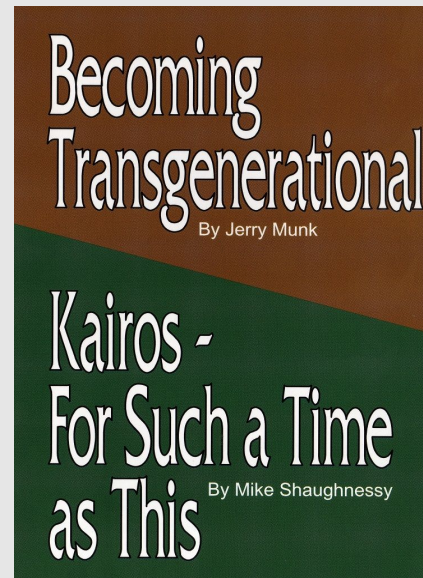
1. Churches and parents assume that involving teens in peer activities is the **key** to vibrant spirituality. Instead, the study found "sticky faith" resulted more from relationships with committed adults than attending events oriented just to youth.

2. Churches and parents think youth group graduates are ready for the struggles ahead. Six out of seven high school seniors feel unprepared for the transition to college life. Most students report retrospectively that the first two weeks of college set the course of their lives for the next four years. The intensity of college plus the perfect storm of independence, making new friends, loneliness, and campus-wide partying catches most of them by surprise. Add to this that among college freshman 40 percent reported difficulty in finding a

church – many of the rest simply didn't bother – and the basis for unpreparedness become evident.

If you have been reading the *Kairos Youth Culture Newsletter* or getting trained by Kairos staff in doing youth work, such findings are not a surprise.

To understand the potential perfect storm brewing in the age ranges of 13-23 and what parents and Kairos youth workers should be doing about it, order a copy of this book from Tabor House.



<http://www.sos-nar.com/tabor.htm>

Youth Mentoring

The group most well known for mentoring youth is probably Big Brothers Big Sisters (BBBS).



Big Brothers Big Sisters

In 1904, Ernest Coulter, a court clerk, founded the Big Brothers movement in New York by convincing 39 volunteers to befriend one boy each. Around the same time, a group called Ladies of Charity were befriending girls who had come through the New York Children's Court. That group would later become [Catholic Big Sisters](#). Currently, Big Brothers Big Sisters are mentoring [270,000](#) youth worldwide.

Like many mentoring organizations, the main focus of BBBS is high risk youth. They mainly work with 11- to 14-year-olds who have experienced domestic violence, divorce, or substance abuse. It is with high risk youth that they are most successful. [BBBS mentoring](#) has been shown to decrease deviant behavior. Those they mentor were shown to be:

- 46% less likely to begin using illegal drugs
- 27% less likely to begin using alcohol
- 52% less likely to skip school
- 33% less likely to hit someone.

They also improved on how they relate to their families. However, stealing and property damage did not decrease among them, nor were their grades shown to improve.

In Kairos we have found that mentoring also has a high impact on Christian youth interested in the upward call. They benefit from relating to someone just a bit older than themselves for learning how to pray, how to discern God's will in their life and how to become responsible for their time, studies, relationships and money. As staff worker Sarah Williamson puts it: "UCO emphasizes discipleship. It



was there that I learned Christianity is not just about a once a week prayer meeting or a retreat high, but about living every moment as a disciple. That's what brings life!"

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